

# **2013 State of the City Address**

**Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey**

*Coronado Theater, Rockford, Illinois  
March 6, 2013*

## ***Pathways to Prosperity***

### **I. Introduction**

City Council members, fellow elected officials, civic leaders, community members, and guests, good evening. It's my privilege tonight to present to you the **2013 State of the City Address** to review with you the City's operations over the past year and prepare for the coming year and beyond.

While we continue to battle through the nation's longest economic downturn since the great depression, I am committed to the positive transformation of our community. I am happy to report tonight that we've made real progress as we work with partners across our community to define, build, and pursue ***Pathways to Prosperity***.

Since my first ***State of the City Address*** in 2006, we have rejected the old way of doing things when we allowed the community to be divided: ***investing for prosperity on the east*** while ***Maintaining concentrated poverty on the west***. At best, we hoped that our so-called ***good investments*** on the east side could support our ***charity work*** on the west side. This ***strategy*** didn't work here and didn't work anywhere in our nation.

This is why I have been committed to ***Excellence Everywhere for Everyone***. Having a **shared vision of excellence** does not allow us to divide ourselves economically or socially, legally or politically.

Our ***Pathways to Prosperity*** are pathways for all of Rockford. Our ***road to riches*** must include investments throughout our community. We must have high expectations for all of Rockford or else we will suffer the failures of our past.

We all benefit when we stay true to the vision of ***Excellence Everywhere***.

- Our citizens' support for this vision propelled our two successful ***Rebuilding Rockford*** campaigns, which are bringing historically high levels of investment in our roads, rail, and riverfront.
- ***Alignment Rockford*** supports this vision by bringing together elected officials, staff, and community leaders into a focused and sustained effort to improve our schools.
- And our economic development partners support this vision when we work together to achieve successes like ***Woodward, Chrysler, and BE Aerospace***.

But we have more work to do.

We know that we have to lower our violent crime rate, reduce our tax burden, and increase job opportunities for all of our citizens -- and that means jobs for the citizens we actually have, and not just the ones we wish we had.

We don't need ***Forbes*** magazine to tell us the obvious and we can't allow ***Forbes*** to define us.

***We define ourselves by who we say we are, not by what others say. By the way, the images you're seeing are a glimpse of the RACVB's upcoming marketing response to the Forbes article -- I can't wait to see the rest!***

The fact is, we are a great people with tough challenges, just like other American cities. But we have every reason to be proud of our history and proud of our success. **But we have no time to waste; no time for self-pity; no-time for self-loathing.**

The road to excellence and prosperity is not easy; but it is much easier and much more rewarding than the "***bigotry of low expectations***" that defined us at times in the past. If we are ready to work to achieve our vision, then nothing on the outside can stop us.

Because of our vision of ***Excellence Everywhere for Everyone***, we are making investments and building ***Pathways to Prosperity*** throughout our City. Tonight I will outline our progress and our plans for our **physical capital and human capital investments**. We can't do one without the other.

It is not enough to have great streets and bridges; new passenger rail service to Chicago; and new waterfront pathways. ***We have to invest in our people and build coordinated and aligned systems to support positive human development.***

An educated, entrepreneurial, engaged, and healthy citizenry is the key to economic prosperity.

As a community, we can't leave our critical need for lifelong learning to chance. So, tonight, I will expand on the vision I have previously discussed of a ***City University Network***, which extends

conceptually what **Alignment Rockford** has done for k-12 education. The **City University Network** will engage our community into a broad-based partnership to deliver affordable higher education and lifelong learning opportunities for all of our citizens.

## II. City Operations Review: Fiscal Discipline Empowers Investments

### A. Budget Management

You may think the City has fiscal challenges, and we do. But our financial shape remains better than our State and Federal counterparts. We have challenges, but we pay our bills on time and we manage our debt responsibly. In these tough economic conditions, we have made progress in rebuilding our community through ongoing, proactive, and disciplined management.

Over the last several years, we have worked to build sustainable and reliable approaches to support our long-term goals.

- Today, our **Sanitation Fee** covers the costs of garbage pickup, street sweeping, and tree trimming which frees up other general fund revenue for police and fire operations.
- Our **Construction Services Department** and **Water Department** operations run solely on fees charged for those services.
- Our self-insured **Health Insurance Fund** is in the black due to higher premiums from our employees, lower usage, and our focus on wellness and prevention.
- We cut millions in debt in our **Redevelopment Fund** by exercising discipline.
- We are executing on a sustainable **Vehicle Fleet Leasing Program** vastly improving the quality and reliability of our equipment and dramatically lowering our maintenance costs.
- Through the support and choice of our citizens, our **Rebuilding Rockford** capital funds are enabling us to retire debt, eliminate finance costs, and leverage millions in State and Federal funds.
- And because of our City Council's work with the new RAVE organization that now operates with SMG both the BMO Harris Bank Center and the Coronado Theater, we expect recurring savings between \$800,000 and \$1 million per year.
- And again, thanks to our citizens, we passed the **Electric Aggregation Referendum** last spring, saving taxpayers an average of 40% on electric power.

This work has not been easy and I commend the citizen lead **Budget & Finance Advisory Group** that helped us set the direction for many of these changes back in 2009. We have had to make tough choices. We have had to say "no" at times to attractive and popular projects and programs.

Despite all of these efforts, we have suffered a declining tax base triggered by the housing market collapse in 2008 and our ongoing home foreclosure crisis. And, this rate, although high, is lower than it would have been if we had not switched from a debt-based property tax

mechanism to a pay-as-you-go sales tax mechanism to pay for our roads.

The decline in our tax base, moreover, has not hit all areas of the city proportionately. Areas in older, poorer sections of the City have been hit harder by unemployment, poverty, and foreclosures. These declines have dramatically hurt our revenue base and forced us to make significant cuts and raise our tax rate to keep up with costs.

Since 2008, we have cut costs in every department except for Police and Fire. Every other department is spending less in 2013 than 2007.

Our management team and front line personnel have done a great job meeting our service delivery needs despite significant personnel cuts.

This includes having 60 fewer staff members in Public Works today compared to 2007.

I'd like us to thank our Public Works team lead by Director Tim Hanson for their outstanding job of keeping the streets maintained and the snow plowed despite these dramatic cuts.

Our costs have gone up significantly on a per employee basis in Police and Fire for three primary reasons:

1. mandatory pension payment increases to cover the cost of retirees who receive automatic annual 3% increases;
2. mandatory binding arbitration decisions that have increased the pay of public safety employee groups over other employee groups; and
3. minimum staffing requirements in our fire contract that force the City to staff at a level beyond our capacity.

We have cut other parts of the budget so that we can maintain public safety services. Public Safety is by far the largest part of the City's operations budget. But we can't do it alone.

## B. Public Safety Operations:

As we have seen in recent years, our **Part A major crime rate has continued to fall.** Unfortunately, we have struggled with significant violent crime. With limited resources and significant public safety needs, we have had to prioritize our expenditures and our Council has directed all available funding to staffing our Police Department.

### **Street Lights**

One of the areas that has given rise to a great deal of concern and misunderstanding was our **2011 Street Light Reduction Program.** I'd like to clarify what we have done and why it was the

right thing to do.

1. Our City Council voted in December 2010 to reduce street lights to cut costs and save sworn police officer positions. We knew we had areas of the City with an unusually high concentration of street lights. We had approximately 14,000 lights in 2010 before the reduction year, 2011. We took down approximately 2,300 lights through the course of the program, with over half of those lights coming from higher traffic arterial and collector streets.
2. *As a result of these cost-cutting efforts, we're saving approximately \$800,000 per year and those savings are keeping officers on the street.* While our City Council could put back the lights, there is no evidence to support that move.
3. We now have a comprehensive ordinance, the **2013 Residential & Collector Street Light Policy**, to guide our Council when reviewing future requests for street lights. Any citizen can make a request pursuant to the new Ordinance.
4. Obviously, a street light makes no difference to daytime crime. On average, more burglaries occur during the day than during the night. In fact, we had a rise in daytime burglaries in 2012 to 56%, the first full year after we removed the lights. And our overall burglary rate has fallen by 26% between 2006 and 2012.
5. Counter to what you might think, the areas with the most lights, as shown on the density map on the left, have the highest number of burglaries. The area with the least lights have the lowest crime. That was true in 2010 and 2012 before and after the lights were removed. The evidence clearly shows that **streetlights by themselves don't control crime.**
6. So, what factors do impact crime? Our data shows that more crime occurs in high unemployment and high poverty areas. These also tend to be the same areas with a high concentration of public housing and section 8 housing. They are also areas with high concentrations of probationers and parolees. Our data also shows that just under 90% of residential burglaries occur when a home is not occupied.
7. I'm sensitive to the fact that street lights can give the feeling of safety without actually addressing the underlying causes of crime. Our job in leadership is to make the best judgement calls utilizing our limited resources. *The bottom line is that we have prioritized keeping as many officers as possible on the street, as our most critical need.*

We're working to address the underlying causes of crime, but we need the entire community coming together to succeed.

#### ***Transparency, Accountability & Collaboration***

Like we have done for years with our ***RockStat*** meetings, I support a collaborative, open, and accountable review of our progress on public safety. That's why I'm very pleased that County Board Chairman Christiansen has committed to recurring ***Public Safety Summit Meetings***, which will support system accountability.

In fact, I have pushed for a data-driven collaboration between our criminal justice partners since 2008, which I referred to then as ***JusticeStat***. There is nothing more frustrating for our City Police Officers than having to arrest and re-arrest the same individuals over and over. *But we can't solve this problem alone. We need the collaboration and support of Cops, Courts, Corrections, and Community to make transformational changes.*

#### ***Prisoner Reentry Network***

When Judge McGraw became our new Chief Judge last year, he brought a renewed spirit of collaboration and we took a full team of local representatives to visit a successful prisoner reentry program in Racine, WI. The Racine program has delivered fantastic results.

Now, with the support of Chairman Christiansen, Sheriff Meyers, the Chief Judge, and Probation, as well as the State DOC, and the U.S. Attorney's Office, we have developed a local version of the Racine approach.

Our first ***Prisoner Reentry Network*** parolee meeting will take place later this month. We will hold violent offenders released back to our community to a higher standard that will be clearly and consistently communicated. We expect them to stay out of trouble and we have the commitment of the U.S. Attorney to prosecute federally any new eligible gun crime committed by these individuals.

#### ***Gang and Gun Crime Prosecutions***

Guns and gangs are a leading cause of violence in our community. Commencing in summer 2012, *Rockford Police began a Felony Gun Case Review with the State's Attorney and the US Attorney*. The monthly meetings review gun arrests to determine the best prosecution strategy. In 2012, the US Attorney prosecuted 10 gun offenders. We expect many more in 2013 as there have already been 4 offenders taken by the US Attorney since the start of the year.

#### ***CAPS, Neighborhood Leadership & Landlord-Tenant Ordinance***

Our Community members are the front line of support for effective public safety partnerships. This is why we continue our ***Citizens Police Academy and Citizens Assisting the Police*** program. Our citizens help us set high expectations and reject the disorder and chaos of crime.

To support this goal, we also approved a ***Landlord-Tenant Ordinance*** recently that establishes clear requirements for a landlord to register their property and provide contact information. A landlord and tenant can also be found liable now for a chronic nuisance when multiple crimes occur on the property. *The shared goal of this effort is to drive higher standards that benefit everyone.*

### **Faith-Based Partners for Public Safety**

We have also been blessed to receive the support from numerous faith-based communities, neighborhood groups, and social service organizations to support our crime reduction efforts. These partners have helped us in the past and will continue to help us in the future with programs like our **Prisoner Reentry Network**. To ensure that our efforts lead to transformation, however, we must do more than simply provide support. We need **accountable support** that starts with high expectations and monitors our progress.

We discovered this past year, for example, that of 66 rental properties where tenants received rent subsidies for homelessness, our Police Department logged 1000 calls over a two-year period. The rental support funding came from the federal government; but our local government and our local citizens cannot tolerate this outrageously high crime rate.

This is why I need your support to drive an improved and accountable system with our partners at HUD. Our citizens deserve to know that the people receiving financial support from taxpayers are not abusing that privilege.

### **Fair Housing Listening Sessions**

As we push for accountability, however, I am aware of our responsibility to ensure fair housing in our community, free from discrimination and segregation. So, from March 12 to March 14, we will be hosting public meetings to discuss the challenges we face in meeting **fair housing standards**. This discussion will also cover the challenge we face to reduce an overconcentration of public housing and the need to provide crime-free housing.

### **Human Relations Commission**

I'm also announcing tonight my support for starting a **Human Relations Commission** to provide a forum and voice for addressing community concerns regarding equity and respect for all our citizens, including fair housing challenges. I look forward to working with our City Council to develop that ordinance.

In the final analysis, to reduce crime, we must set high standards and forge the best possible partnerships between citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders. It is for these reasons that I am supporting Geographic Based Policing.

### **Geographic Policing**

Geo Policing is the best strategy to support our citizens and leverage the power of our citizens.

Let me reaffirm that the City has the financial ability to operate our department under a geographic policing approach. In fact, we're actively working to hire up to 22 new officers this year to meet our budgeted level of 285 sworn officers. Geo Policing is the right thing to do and that's why we need to move forward on our plan now.

- First, our plan will show that the cost of renovating three existing smaller buildings will be less than or equivalent to the cost of a single large new building and will give us the approach most supportive of our community's needs.
- Second, we simply cannot stay in the dilapidated and outdated old Public Safety Building. If we do nothing, our costs will skyrocket since the County will soon be out of the PSB entirely leaving only the City to carry the building's growing costs, now over \$1.5 million per year.
- Finally, we can't afford to wait. Our failed results of the past demonstrate the terrible cost of defending the status quo. Our citizens want geo policing and our leadership team wants geo policing. We can do it efficiently and effectively.

### C. Pension & Collective Bargaining Reform

In the spirit of the lifelong Cubs fan that I am, I keep wanting to believe that this is the year...for **pension and collective bargaining reform.**

*All kidding aside, let me say this: I have great respect for our Police and Fire personnel, like I do for all of the City's employees. When I critique or comment on salaries, benefits, or any other issue, it's not because I don't respect and support them; I do it because it's my job.* Local taxpayers simply can't afford to pay what was promised or guaranteed by past State legislatures. We need reforms now.

I am asking for the same reforms as last year, with one addition. We are also asking for the right to have **Arbitration Hearings Open to the Public.** *It is unconscionable that an unelected, out-of-town arbitrator can hit us with a forced pay increase or benefits increase and the public is shut out of the process!*

Representative Sosnowski has filed a bill designed to fix the problem. There will likely be a hearing on the matter next week. Please let him and other State leaders know that you support this important bill.

### III. Investing in Prosperity Everywhere: The Physical Rebuilding & Maintenance of our City

#### A. East

***To achieve Excellence Everywhere, we must invest in Excellence Everywhere***

Consequently, we are working to drive high expectations and significant investments throughout our community, which includes the east side.

- The East State Street retail shopping corridor has helped the community compete well

for sales tax revenues and commercial and hospitality amenities.

- The City has annexed almost all of the available land west of the Tollway and hundreds of acres east of the Tollway.
- The Tollway Authority completely rebuilt the interchange of I-90 and US20 at over \$60 million just a few years ago.
- I personally lobbied for the Tollway to include the widening of I-90 when they were voting on the plan.
- In 2012, we incentivized and landed the **Swedish American Regional Cancer Center** at I-90 and Riverside.
- And our east side retail strength is about to get even stronger.

The **Perryville Promenade** has just been announced. It will be anchored by a **Meijer Superstore** and will ultimately feature over 600,000 square feet of retail. The project is projected to create over 1,000 construction jobs and hundreds of full-time jobs.

### **B. Central/State Street Corridor Investments**

We have also approved a new TIF for the **East State Street Corridor from Alpine to Mulford** -- to ensure that we build and maintain the infrastructure before it falls into further decay. Vacant properties and blight have been creeping into this area for years. With major anchor institutions like **OSF St. Anthony Hospital and Rockford College**, we know we have outstanding assets from which to build. It was critical to act before more damage was done.

We have great retail, residential, and commercial properties as well as outstanding parks in this area. We need to connect these assets, including the all-season recreational facility, **Alpine Hills Adventure Park**, that the Park District is planning at the site of the old **Alpine Hills Golf Course**.

### **C. West Side Investments: Roads, Rail, Runways, & Riverfront**

On our City's west side, in 2013 we will make great strides in building **Pathways to Prosperity**. Much of our City's west side infrastructure seemed ignored for over 50 years. This year, we'll see great progress.

- South Main Street will be fully under construction;
- We will be close to completing the construction of our new Morgan Street Bridge; and
- We will work on the architecture and engineering for the new **\$13 million South Main Multi-Modal Rail Station**. We're making progress on the design, but we need to push the State for progress on improving the tracks that will carry the passenger trains.

And I agree with the **RAEDC Regional Diversification Plan**, which calls on us to

**“Continue to build broad-based regional support for passenger rail connections between Chicago and the Rockford region.”**

With your support, I know we'll get it done.

Unfortunately, it appears that the State's preferred route has costs well above the original estimate. I will be meeting later this month with State Transportation Secretary Ann Schneider to discuss this concern and we need our community to join in pushing for a resolution.

- After years of planning and site acquisition, we'll also begin Phase I of **Rebuilding West State Street**, our City's main western gateway. This project required acquiring over 100 properties and will bring a dramatic improvement to the area.
- **Rebuilding of West State Street** also supports the Rockford Housing Authority's **Choice Neighborhood Plan**. The transformation plan for Rockford's Ellis Heights/Fairgrounds neighborhood identified five key initiatives: jobs, youth, physical improvements, capacity building, and education. We look forward to our continued work with RHA and HUD to make the plan a reality.
- The **North Main and Auburn Roundabout** will also be under construction this year after years of development. I have been pleased to work with stakeholders including **local attorney and historian, Tom Johnson**. As we are completing the design of the intersection, we will define a signature theme that will celebrate Rockford history and provide a fitting tribute to our veterans.
- As we have hoped, the completion of the Main and Auburn roundabout has also spurred interest from developers. We have begun discussions and hope to move a significant retail project forward this year at that intersection.
- This will not, however, be the City's first roundabout. That first occurred last year at **College Avenue and Seminary Street** as part of the Morgan Street Bridge project and a mixed use housing and retail development adjacent to the intersection.

I am also excited and proud of our continued investments along our riverfront, including our completed **Riverwalk adjacent to the Riverfront Museum Park**. Making public investments along the riverfront was one of the top recommendations of the **2012 RAEDC Regional Diversification Plan**.

**Strategy 2B.1: Leverage public investments along the Rock River to generate private sector-driven urban revitalization centered on the region's most valuable natural asset.**

For the first time in my lifetime, you can actually see and access the riverfront at this important community site. Our community's commitment to projects like this and our willingness to lobby for tools like our **River Edge State Historic Tax Credits** is supporting private sector jobs and investment.

- In 2012, for example, we saw the start of the massive undertaking to renovate the **Prairie Street Brewery Building**. The home for the past two years of **Dinner on the Dock** and **many weddings and banquets**, the project should be completed by mid-year and will feature fulltime restaurants, commercial office space, and housing.
- Our City investments downtown have also encouraged private sector spending in projects like the **new retail center at Jefferson and Third**, which is the first new retail construction project we've had in many years downtown, making a dramatic improvement to a blighted site.
- The City also supported in 2012 the opening of **The District** restaurant and nightclub downtown, adding another fine restaurant and music venue to support our community.
- And in 2013, with support from our City Council and the use of **State River Edge Redevelopment Zone Capital funds**, construction will commence on the **Indoor City Market** to Complement our very successful **Outdoor Market**.

City Council has also approved the sale of bonds and the hiring of architects and engineers to transform the old Ingersoll Building along the riverfront into a multi-sport recreational facility as part of the region's **Reclaiming First** tourism plan.

This work delivers on another recommendation from the **Regional Diversification Plan** to build a downtown destination project:

**Strategy 2B.3: Consider using incentives to attract a destination project (design/visual arts school, hotel/restaurant/retail complex, etc.) that can serve as a catalyst to spur a greater level of activity along downtown Rockford's riverfront.**

The multiple uses for the new **Ingersoll Sports Facility** include destination tournaments and sports for our local schools. We are leveraging approximately \$8 million in State funds to make this project possible, and the balance will be covered by our **Redevelopment Fund**, which has those dollars available because we made the hard decisions as a City Council.

In 2012, we further paved the way for progress along our riverfront with the demolition of the old Tapco Building and the agreement we reached with developer, **Gorman & Company**, to determine the feasibility of redeveloping the old **Amerock Building**.

The commitment by the City to move forward with the ***Ingersoll Sports Facility*** has been instrumental. In the weeks ahead, we will work with Gorman as they complete a feasibility analysis for a destination hotel and conference center at the old Amerock Building, which we hope will lead to a positive decision to move forward.

#### **IV. Partnerships for Prosperity:The City University Network**

##### **A. Background**

As I have said, the key to prosperity is improving educational attainment and ***Alignment Rockford*** is helping us achieve rapid improvements. I am thankful to our local employers that are responding to the invitation to help. In 2012, dozens of employers came to the ***Alignment Rockford Academy Expo*** demonstrating careers in 64 different fields to over 1400 Jefferson students. We'll need even more help next year when the ***2013 Academy Expo*** is held on September 18th and over 5,000 RPS 205 students are expected to attend. We'll need 140 careers demonstrated to handle students from all the high schools.

Together, we are designing real life contextual learning and mentoring opportunities for all of our children. But we have more work to do to meet our higher education and lifelong learning needs.

My intention is to leverage what we have learned from ***Alignment Rockford*** and leverage our physical asset investments to expand lifelong learning opportunities. We don't have a major Illinois public undergraduate university here; but we do have so much to build upon that we don't need to beg the State for something that is not going to happen. ***The alternative to one big public higher education provider is the creation of a managed, flexible network of providers***. This is the idea behind the ***City University of Rockford Network***.

As I have stated previously, the world of ***higher education is on the verge of rapid change. The current cost structure and value proposition is simply not sustainable.***

The good news is that because of advances in online learning, much of the traditional classroom lecture experience is becoming a commodity. ***Rockford is poised to benefit from our large number of employer and community assets that can become unique experiences in a new model for a university.***

You may have heard of a concept emerging in education called the “flipped” classroom, which has been described as follows:

In a flipped classroom the traditional method of lecturing in class and assigning homework for students to complete at home is reversed. Students listen and watch lectures via video on their own time outside of class, and use the time in class to complete homework, work through problems, collaborate with others and the instructor, discuss advanced concepts, and other more engaging or interactive activities.

*"Information is not instruction." - David Merrill. Utah State University*

I would like to extend the notion of the flipped classroom to the flipped college. College and higher education in the future will emphasize experiences outside the classroom where students are learning with other students or an employer as they test and experiment with the content. Consequently, if we are open to creating extensive career and community connections for high school students through **Alignment Rockford**, then we can extend that approach to college students.

*The idea is relatively simple, we're building off of our local employment strengths and inviting education partners to join us.*

In 2013, my goal is to launch the **City University Network** brand and explore academic divisions focused on our core strengths and core needs.

Let me provide a snapshot of the types of things that we can do to make this vision a reality.

#### ***B. Supporting Student Life and a “College Town” Identity.***

At any given time in Rockford, we have over 12,000 enrolled students taking college and other post-secondary course work at several institutions.

Our community also boasts many amenities that would be the envy of any college or university including outstanding parks and recreation, a robust mass transit system, and numerous libraries and museums.

Despite all of the colleges, despite all of the students, and despite all of the amenities, why don't we have the personality or reputation of being a college town? In short, the many parts have not equaled a whole. This is the reason we need to build the **City University Network**.

*The long-term, cumulative investments of our partners must be leveraged into a new, branded identity for higher education.*

To move the vision forward, we are exploring several ideas including:

- A shared, multi-college campus incorporating elements like housing, a retail village, library, and student center. A concept like this could be built, for example, along our riverfront, incorporating both existing and new buildings.
- In fact, I have asked the Rockford Housing Authority to work with us and work with HUD to explore the feasibility of converting some of the RHA's downtown housing high rises to shared student housing.

- With over 12,000 higher education students in Rockford, we have a great opportunity to build a concentration of students in our downtown along our riverfront to support our ***City University Network*** vision.
- With the creation of the ***Ingersoll sports facility***, moreover, there is no reason why we can't support college intramural sports and tournaments like we do high school sports.

With my time remaining, let me cover some of the potential higher education "lab" experiences that our community can build with our private sector partners. I am only highlighting these areas tonight. The real work to make any of these visions happen will occur tomorrow and beyond.

***I invite those of you who support these concepts to let me know by checking out the Facebook Fan Page that we will are creating to continue the conversation.***

#### C. Program Concept 1: *The Center for Public Safety*

Today, a bachelor's degree or the equivalent has become the minimum level of attainment needed to be hired by our Police and Fire Departments. Consequently, our leadership is working to identify local pathways for Rockford citizens to complete a bachelor's degree program right here to prepare them for success in our organization.

- The process has started with the creation of ***Explorer's Posts*** that enable teenage Rockford students to begin working with our Police and Fire Department personnel.
- We are working with ***District 205 to create academic pathways*** that will connect upper level 205 students into credit-based public safety courses.
- We are also exploring dual credit and dual enrollment possibilities with our local colleges to give Rockford students a jump start into a college.
- The next step is partnering to ensure that all of the necessary college course are available right here. This is why we must grow our ***City University Network***.
- A partnership between the City of Rockford and ***Rockford College***, for example, can support this education pathways and be the heart of our ***Network***.
- The final piece will be designing and approving a cadet program that would allow for paid internships and jobs for students who are at least 18 years of age and are preparing for police or fire public safety career.

***Having police and fire science education paths and job-training paths would be a huge improvement to our City organization. This effort would add immediate workforce capacity, improve our recruiting success rate, and improve our workforce diversity.***

#### **D. Program Concept 2: *The Illinois Institute for Aviation & Aerospace***

Another program concept with immediate potential is the ***Illinois Institute for Aviation & Aerospace at Rockford.***

We have local aerospace employers with world-class labs and experiences outside the classroom that could round out a student's education. In fact, those are the exact opportunities that we explored when the community came together to recruit ***Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.***

*There is no reason why we can't create those same opportunities outside the classroom for other colleges and universities that are here or who would come here.*

That's the precise logic behind the ***JiET-A*** program that has been launched through a partnership between the ***RAEDC, NIU, Rock Valley College, and Rockford College.***

The ***Regional Diversification Plan*** discusses the need to support the continued work of ***JiET-A.***

**Strategy 4A.4: Provide continued support for the JiET-A (Joint Institute of Engineering & Technology | Aerospace) public-private training program to ensure its success in expanding the Rockford region's pipeline of future skilled aerospace workers.**

The goal is to recruit and retain students to pursue multiple available career paths in the aerospace engineering field and to even offer the opportunity for dual enrollment to advanced high school students who can begin their college credit work through the partnership.

If we can make the ***JiET-A*** partnership work for aerospace engineering, there is no reason that we can't provide the same opportunities in other areas of aerospace like maintenance, repair, and overhaul or even flight training.

While the Rockford Airport leadership is pursuing opportunities to land a major MRO employer, our ability to do so depends on our ability to support training and education for certified aerospace mechanics.

***This idea of an Aviation & Aerospace Institute is a vision worth supporting right now.***

***Let me pause for a moment to thank outgoing RAEDC Executive Director, Janyce Fadden, for***

her leadership, vision, and friendship in supporting efforts like JiET-A and so many other creative economic development efforts for our community. Janyce, we wish you the best and you will be greatly missed.

#### **E. Program Concept 3: *The Center for Health, Wellness, & Technology***

For a community to be livable and thrive it must be healthy. We have a unique chance to be a beacon of good health, to expand our health care industry, connect it to our schools and career pathways for our children, and to improve the health of our employees and citizens.

Based on the success of our own health plan initiatives as well as the demand for community health and wellness, we are working with the developer for the Barber-Colman campus, **Belmont-Sayre**, on a vision of this site as a center for Health, Education, & Technology.

Ladies and Gentlemen we have the tools, the infrastructure, and the talent to lead the nation and build a **Center for Health, Wellness & Technology**. This is a critical path to our prosperity and it is a goal of my administration. This approach builds from of our local healthcare strengths and our planned physical investments around Barber-Colman. It makes sense and we should explore now the opportunity to be a catalyst for that vision through the City's RFP for an onsite or near site clinic.

#### **F. Program Concept 4: *The Downtown Center for Art & Design***

I spoke last year of a vision of creating a downtown arts campus. I still support that vision. I am also encouraged that the concept of a high school curriculum and college campus focused on design was recently supported by the **Regional Diversification Plan**. The plan calls for the creation of a downtown design college, design curriculum, and design campus, including office, residential, and incubator spaces.

**Strategy 4B.1: Work with the Rockford region's business, government, and community leaders to fund the development or attraction of a design school into downtown Rockford.**

**Strategy 4B.2: Integrate design curriculum in the Rockford region's K-12 schools as well as *Rock Valley Community College, Rockford College, and NIU Rockford* to prepare the region's future workforce for the design industry.**

**Strategy 4B.3: Establish and support the growth of a mixed-use "Design District" in the zone immediately surrounding the new design school in downtown Rockford that concentrates the region's design-related educational facilities, provides incubator and prototyping space, houses design studios and office**

space, and provides live-work housing opportunities for design professionals.

**This plan is another great concept with incredible long-term job and economic opportunities for our community. It's a concept that is ready for us today because in our 21st Century Global Economy:**

- Content creation, production, broadcasting, and recording are no longer the exclusive domain of hollywood, NY, or Chicago.
- Designing and creating products are no longer the exclusive domain of large companies with huge research budgets.
- The concept of an art and design campus can involve all aspects of art and design: visual arts; performing arts; digital arts and entertainment; industrial design and manufacturing.
- Progress toward this vision has been made through the recent acquisition of the former First Presbyterian Church by the Mendelssohn Club. Mendelssohn has had great initial success and is preparing to be a strong partner supporting this concept.
- Moreover, there is no reason why we cannot extend our art and design offerings to include the culinary arts and build on our midwest strengths to create **The Illinois Institute for Local Foods, Agriculture, Hospitality & Culinary Arts.** **This concept leverages our State's outstanding history in agricultural education; our local culinary and hospitality strengths; and our State's emphasis on supporting a local foods economy.**
- There is no reason to delay incorporating the study of the arts and design into the fabric of who we are as was recommended in the **Regional Diversification Plan.**

#### **G. Transforming our Efforts from Maintaining Poverty into Creating Pathways to Prosperity**

Our vision for an arts and design campus can and should include opportunities for all of our citizens. At one time, many of our residents could have learned **on the job skills** necessary to make a reasonable living. In a service economy, however, many have found themselves **lacking the skills and aptitude to succeed.** Without a well-paying job, without self worth, we have suffered many devastating impacts including higher unemployment, higher poverty, and higher crime.

The clear winners in our economy are the owners. Unfortunately, we have lost many locally owned companies and many of our residents lack the skills to obtain higher paying service jobs.

To address this challenge, the **Regional Diversification Plan** also includes the development of

business and entrepreneurship curriculum for our schools and colleges:

**Strategy 1B.1: Work with the region's public K-12 schools, EIGERlab, and Rock Valley College Small Business Development Center to integrate stronger business curricula (especially entrepreneurship and international business) and junior achievement programs into the region's schools.**

Because of our City's partnership with the RAEDC and the EIGER Lab, we already support manufacturing entrepreneurship and business development for existing or start-up businesses. The problem is that:

- We do not have an entrepreneurship-based education platform for our schools.
- We also do not have an entrepreneurship pathway for individuals who are in poverty.

As I have stated, we need to make sure our learning and employment pathways are true pathways for the citizens we actually have, not just for the citizens we wish we had.

*This means that we have to have meaningful and challenging opportunities for people who may be coming back to our community from the jail system or for people who have lived in public housing and have little employment experience.*

You may have read over the past weekend of a local collaboration that we have been developing with the online marketplace, **Etsy**.

- Etsy enables people to buy and sell handcrafted goods directly.
- Last year, its online platform provided \$900 million in sales for small craft manufacturers and vintage sellers, with sales growing around 70% yearly.
- Our Etsy partnership has two components: (1) designing an **entrepreneurship curriculum** for traditional students and adult, continuing education students; and (2) utilizing **the Etsy sales platform** as a "living lab" to learn entrepreneurship skills and earn money at the same time.

In a way, **Etsy** takes us back to our City's origins as a home for so many European immigrants who located here with their native craft making skills and a distinct entrepreneurial and pioneering spirit. Together, we built a culture and habit for entrepreneurship and manufacturing. That was a great recipe for prosperity then; and it is a recipe to which we are about to return.

**[Run Etsy Video]**

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, **Tonight is not the end. It's not even the beginning of the end. But, perhaps, it's the end of the beginning.'**

We've laid a foundation for success by having the courage to invest in ourselves and our City.

Our future economy will range from our growing aerospace cluster to handmade artisan goods created here and sold across the globe. In our new economy, we're building ***Pathways to Prosperity*** for all of our citizens and throughout our community.

We're defining ourselves by the choices we are making now, not by our past.

That's all that matters.

***You see, the pathway to prosperity, it's a pathway for everyone. We're not going to segregate people who may be poor or have had challenges. We're not going to relegate them to the past, relegate them to another part of our community. They are our community, we are their community. We're one Rockford.***

\* \* \*

I have been proud to be your mayor for nearly eight years. A lot has changed in my life and in the life of this City over that time. While my agenda is much the same as it was eight years ago, having a wife and children increases exponentially the depth of meaning of the work.

As I have said many times in the past, we have to act as though nobody from the outside is coming to save us. We have to make our own opportunities.

That's why I reached out to ***Etsy's CEO, Chad Dickerson***, and I am so proud of the team we have assembled to make our partnership with ***Etsy*** a national success story.

You see, Rockford is not alone. And I think, no, I know, that we can lead, we can create a new **Pathway to Prosperity**, and not only for our own people.

We can demonstrate ***Pathways to Prosperity for our entire country***.

Rockford isn't done.

We have not been left behind.

We are leaders.

We can do and become whatever we want... and we will.

God Bless You. Goodnight.

